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C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 001272

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: ASD SHINN MEETINGS WITH ROK DFM LEE: PROGRESS ON  
ALLIANCE ISSUES MUST COME SLOWLY AND QUIETLY

Classified By: POL M/C Joseph Y. Yun, Reasons 1.4 (b,d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. Deputy Foreign Minister (DFM) Lee Yong-joon told visiting Assistant Secretary of Defense (ASD) for Asia and Pacific Security Affairs James Shinn that discussions on a number of U.S.-ROK Alliance issues would be "temporarily postponed" in light of the domestic political situation arising out of recent protests over the Lee Administration's handling of U.S. beef imports. DFM Lee stressed that Alliance issues, including SMA and camp returns, clearly needed to be resolved before the end of the year, but could not happen publicly until the "domestic situation stabilized." He assured ASD Shinn, however, that the ROKG was committed to resolving these Alliance issues, emphasizing that internal ROKG discussions continued so as to prepare for negotiations with the U.S. as soon as politically possible. Similarly, the ROKG was now considering its options for further global security cooperation in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as preparing for the extension of its PKO deployment to Lebanon set to expire in July. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) DFM Lee said that the domestic political situation surrounding the beef issue required that movement on Alliance issues be "temporarily postponed." He said the ROKG was aware that those issues were important and needed to be resolved before the end of the year, but noted that an extended negotiation period could also prove undesirable for the Alliance. This would be true particularly if the two sides' differences played out in the press, exposing the ROKG and the Alliance, to further public criticism, DFM Lee explained. While formal and public negotiations were unwise, he called for continued informal discussions to lay the foundation for later decisions. DFM Lee stressed that the ROKG was actively engaged in internal discussions on SMA and Camp Returns and assured ASD Shinn that the ROKG would be ready to begin formal negotiations with the U.S. side "as soon as the domestic situation stabilized."

¶3. (C) ASD Shinn agreed that pending Alliance issues needed to be resolved and negotiations handled with appropriate sensitivity to the current political circumstances, but stressed that both sides must find a way to continue as soon as possible. ASD Shinn highlighted the need for prompt resolution of the camp returns issue in particular, as postponing returns incurred additional, unnecessary costs and further delayed the implementation of our agreements to realign USFK presence on the Peninsula. Chang Ho-jin, Deputy Director General for North American Affairs and Chair of the ROK-U.S. Special Joint Committee (JC) on Camp Returns noted

that the Special JC had already convened once, in conjunction with two informal meetings with the U.S. Chair MajGen Frank Panter, and made some progress on finding a solution for the nine USFK facilities to be returned in 2008.

¶4. (C) Turning to global security cooperation, DFM Lee noted that the ROKG had decided to extend the ROK PKO deployment to Lebanon after its current mission expired in July. He explained that the ROKG was now preparing legislation and paving the way for approval of the extension by the National Assembly once it reconvened in the coming weeks. DFM Lee also said that the 26-person ROK medical and vocational team had begun their work in Kabul and that the ROKG was considering its options for further reconstruction assistance in Afghanistan. The evolving security situation in Afghanistan continued to be a concern though, he added.

¶5. (C) ASD Shinn thanked DFM Lee for the ROKG contributions in Afghanistan. Noting he had just come from the Paris Conference where the ROKG had committed USD 30 million for Afghanistan's reconstruction, ASD Shinn expressed appreciation for the ROKG's consideration to provide police trainers to help reform and build up the Afghan National Police force. Internal security was a precondition for economic redevelopment, so ROK assistance in this field would be of great benefit and appreciated by the Afghan government, NATO, the UN Security Council, and the U.S. DFM Lee responded that the ROKG had not yet made a final decision about sending police trainers and was still considering the security situation and whether the ROK public would support such a despatch of ROK police. DFM Lee stressed that the ROK would make additional contributions in Afghanistan, but was

still considering its options. ASD Shinn noted that as Secretary Gates had said to Defense Minister Lee Sang-hee, the ROK's tremendous success in rebuilding its postwar society and economy was truly amazing. As such, he suggested that the ROK might find some way to use that experience to help Afghanistan rebuild through a PRT. In response, DFM Lee indicated that fielding a PRT with experienced personnel was not the issue, but rather, security remained the primary limitation, especially since the USG had made it clear that it would not provide security. ASD Shinn encouraged the ROKG to look to the contributions other countries were making to PRTs in Afghanistan for ideas on how to address the security concern.

¶6. (U) ASD Shinn has cleared this message.  
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